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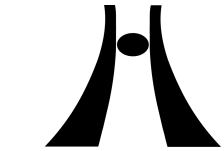

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Popularity of Indie Games

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Abstract

The rising popularity of indie games is researched to answer the research aim: *why have indie games gained their popularity?* A study of relevant literature is performed to determine if there is a definition for good game design and to find out what technological developments have helped indie games rise in fame. Relevant articles to the research aim are also discussed. To explore what developers think of indie games interviews are attempted and a survey is distributed on various online forums to find out what people like about indie games. A conclusion is reached that show people like the creative nature of indie games and that they tend to have a emphasis on gameplay over high technological graphics.

Keywords: *indie games, game design, gameplay*

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

September the 18th 2010, *Minecraft* creator *Markus 'Notch' Persson* posts on his blog about his current server issues and that he has disabled payments and made Minecraft “free to play” until the server issues are sorted. This generated a spike in sales of over 25,000 purchases in 24 hours, 4 months later in January 2011 the game had passed a sales number of 1 million copies. By November 7th 2011 Minecraft had over 4 million copies sold; this is 11 days before the games official release. Minecraft generated more sales prior to release than some high budget games generate in a life time. While Minecraft is probably one of a kind, there is no denying that indie games have grown in popularity over the past few years. With indie games such as *Super Meat Boy* and *Limbo* selling over 1 million copies each and game reviewers now frequently reviewing upcoming indie games on their websites as well as writing about indie game news. While Valve's digital distribution platform Steam regularly has indie games amongst the 20 games on their Top Sellers list where most of the industries leading high budget games also appear.

For those unfamiliar with the term indie games here comes a brief clarification. An indie game is developed by a independent game developer. Indie is short for independent and it means that the game is developed and published without the founding of a game publisher. These developers are commonly small teams of people (sometimes not even a team but one person) developing games with a low or nonexistent budget. This allows them to take higher risks in development than the massive budget games the big publishers put out, since they do not need to sell as much to be beneficial. *David Michael* the author of *The Indie Game Development Survival Guide* [1] writes that high budget games cannot afford to take any risks in their development since their high development costs require them to try and reach as many people as possible to maximize sales profits. He then adds that indie game developers can take these risks due to their much smaller budgets by targeting audiences the general public overlook as well as by making games that would not be approved by big publishers due to different reasons such as too small market share or that the idea just does not appeal to them. This gives indie developers more creative freedom when it comes to the production of their games. These games are most commonly distributed through digital distribution and are usually sold at a lower price point compared to high budget games.

The indie culture is not something that is exclusive for the games industry, for example both the music and film industry have indie music and indie film. And they share similar traits to their game counterparts, which becomes quite clear when you read this from a journal by *Michael Z. Newman* called *Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative* [2]:

> *'...indie cinema, like indie culture more generally, derives its identity from challenging the mainstream. This challenge is figured first of all from an economic distinction between modes of production. "Indie" connotes small-scale, personal, artistic, and creative; "mainstream" implies a large-scale commercial media industry that values money more than art.'*

David Michael the author of The Indie Game Development Survival Guide also mention that indie games have several things in common with indies from other industries.

1.2 Research Focus and Overall Research Objectives

1.2.1 Research Focus

The increasing media coverage and praise for indie games raises some interesting questions. What is it about indie games that people actually like? What technical developments during the past years have made it possible for indie games to reach their current fame? The current selection of scientific studies around indie games seems to be thin or even nonexistent. While there does exist books and scientific papers on game design there is a shortage on scientific papers about indie games. This might be because that indie games are a relatively new subject for the general public. While there does exist several magazine articles about indie games they are generally just speculations and observations of gaming journalists.

One of the aims of this research is to find out what specific qualities of indie games help attract their customers, to gain a better understanding of why and what people want and expect when they buy indie games. Another part of the research is to try and identify what the largest contributing technological development is that have helped indie games to reach more people which in turn gave it larger recognition in the gaming industry and in gaming media. To find out if there is a general definition for what good game design is, is also a part of the research. Identifying what developers think on the subject could also help validate the other results as well as to bring additional information to light. The various results are then compared to come to a conclusion on why indie games have seen a rise in popularity.

1.2.2 Overall Research Objectives

To summarize the aim of this research is to answer the question *why have indie games gained their popularity* with these research objectives as guidelines:

1. *Analyze* if there is any definition for what good game design is.
2. *Identify* what technological advancement has helped indie games rise in popularity.
3. *Explore* the developers and customers views on indie games.
4. *Analyze* the data collected to form a conclusion.

This is to help people that might be curious about indie game development identify quickly what people expect and want from indie games. As well as to give general ideas as to how those who came before them succeeded. It could be debated that this information can already be found on the Internet through reading forums and gaming journalists articles about the subject, which is somewhat true but you probably will not find any research paper on the matter.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review: Conclusion

While exploring the literature on games a scientific paper by the name of *Definition of Videogames* was found that was written by *Grant Tavinor*. [3] In this paper he tries to define what a video game actually is and comes to the following conclusion:

> 'X is a videogame iff it is an artefact in a digital visual medium, is intended primarily as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of one or both of the following modes of engagement: rule-bound gameplay or interactive fiction.'

2.1.1 Game design

When it comes to studying game design something soon became very apparent, while there are a lot of books on game design that describe what game design is and how you execute it, what actually is good game design is entirely subjective to what genre of game you are making and there is no definite mold for what makes good game design, other than interface and option standards. [4][5][6] There is one thing that all these books have in common though when describing game design and that is that they all talk about how you should always think about how the players of your game will perceive and interact with your game. How will they hold the controller of choice? Is the button layout suitable and provides minimal discomfort? Will they get the general ideas that you are trying convey in your game scenario? Are the objectives of the game clear to the player, both the long term objectives and the short term objectives? *Scott Rogers* the author of *Level Up!: The Guide to Great Video Game Design* [7] had this particular line in his book: "ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT HUMANS ARE PLAYING THESE GAMES". So arguably trying to predict how and why your players will react and interact with your game is a big part of game design. Another thing most of them have in common is how they state that while good gameplay can substitute for good graphics, good graphics cannot make up for bad gameplay. They all also agree on that your game has to have it's own twist even if you are basing a lot of the game on previous games in your genre of choice. Like this particular statement implies: "*In fact when we design games, we often start with a previous game and change just one element in it"* [8]

2.1.2 Indie Games

Forbes published an article about indie games called *Indie Game Developers Rise Up* [9] where they interview *Chris Swain*. He states that there are two reasons for the recent rise in indie game popularity first that there are more educations that encourage small developers to differentiate in gameplay since they cannot compete with the complex graphics of the big budget games and the second reason being that digital distribution has finally arrived. Digital distribution allows indie developers to cut the costs of distributing the game by large margins. They do not have to pay shelf space, shipping costs and disc manufacturing costs. In another publication he writes that:

> *'Individual creators, including kids in their bedrooms, will and already do own*

viable intellectual property. Digital distribution fuels this technology shift. Enlightened distribution platforms, such as the iPhone App Store (http://store.apple.com/us/browse/home/shop_iphone/family/iphone?mco=3587D031) and Xbox Live Community Games (http://creators.xna.com/en-us/XboxLIVECommunityGames), are expediting the shift by making it possible for creators to simply upload content as they would videos to YouTube, but instead they now sell directly to buyers just as if they were offering goods on Amazon Marketplace.' [10]

The former journals message can be supported by the writings of *Philippe Rupp* and *Thibault Estier* in their paper called *A Model for a Better Understanding of the Digital Distribution of Music in a Peer-to-Peer Environment* [11]. Where they discuss how digital distribution have affected the music industry and what advantages it brings along with it. Among them the freedom to publish your own works directly to the consumers. While you can argue that the games industry and the music industry are different, the positive effects of digital distribution seem similar as the previous two articles show. Even back in 2003 when The Indie Game Development Survival Guide was published the author encourages the developers to use digital distribution. [1] Even though back then it did not have the global recognition and support it has today. Judging by these findings and the fact that most if not all indie games today are distributed through digital distribution, it is safe to assume that this is the technological advancement that has made indie games reach their current popularity.

2.1.3 Articles on the topic of Indie Games

The articles the video game websites publish on certain indie games does offer a fair analysis on the subject by something that could be argued is a middle man between developers and customers, they inform people of game industry news, write reviews for the games released and have regular articles about upcoming games as well as write articles analyzing particular industry phenomenas. *Luke Plukett* argues in his article on *Kotaku* that while Minecraft is a good or maybe even great game he thinks there is something else to why it has gained its fame. [12] He argues that it is the idea behind Minecraft that the gamers love, that in this now advertising heavy industry a game with no advertising budget at all can become successful and go head-to-head with the blockbusters of the industry. Another article called *The Rise of the Indie Developer* written by *Laura Parker [13]* discusses various reasons for indie games rise in popularity, mentioning how the publishers quickly adapted to the new trends with their different distribution methods such as Steam, Xbox Live Arcade, Playstation Network, the App Store and the WiiWare giving the developers help to reach a much needed audience. The article brings up various quotes from indie game developers where they express the importance of standing out with your ideas and that the passion of the developers is important. The various developers also mention that while target audience might be important, the most important aspect is designing a game you want to make, can enjoy and be proud of, chances are if you like it somebody else might too. However it also brings up the huge luck involved with getting your game noticed by the players. The second article discusses a lot of interesting points about indie games. A lot of the more recognized developers all discuss how using your own ideas and sticking out in the large industry is important and most of them also mention how that you have to design a game you yourself can enjoy and be proud of and that the recipe for success has a lot to do with luck and being recognized by your audience. The idea the first article discusses is also interesting, that the Minecraft success has come from people loving the idea of a very small low budget game standing up to the blockbuster competition and on some points even surpassing it. These two articles confirms that while there is a target audience for indie games in general, indie game developers have issues being recognized by this

audience the same way as Minecraft has.

3 Research Method

We have previously discussed and come to conclusions for the first two research objectives. For the last part *Explore* the developers and customers views on indie games, empirical data will be needed. This data will be collected is through a combination of surveys and interviews. *John Biggam* writes in his book *Succeeding with Your Masters Dissertation: A Practical Step-by-Step Handbook* [14] writes that:

> *'A survey is a representative selection from the population of a particular type, for instance, a survey of 30 universities from the population of universities in the UK or a survey of 200 retail companies in Europe.'*

Arguably this is the research strategy that this research fits into. While both surveys and interviews will be used in this research, to get the opinions of both developers and consumers, the interviews that will be conducted will be on multiple companies and not in depth enough to call it a case study. This is what Biggam has to say about case studies:

> *'The case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensely the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit.'*

While you could argue that interviews are held to study an individual unit, in this case a developer or multiple developers. The questions in these interviews will not be used for the purpose of probing deeply and trying to figure out the motivations behind said developers. Instead the questions are all focused around the subject of indie games popularity as well as game design and the technological advancements that have helped indie games reach their fame.

3.1 Survey

The survey is the first topic of discussion. The sampling method used for the survey is random sampling. The survey was hosted on Kwik Surveys a website specializing in free survey hosting without limitations. This was a choice of convenience since a lot other sites seemed to have limitations and or charged fees for hosting surveys. A true sampling size for the survey was never determined instead the goal was to gather as much data as possible during the given time frame. To gather this data the survey was posted on several gaming forums on the Internet: FZ.se, minecraftforums.net, the blizzard off topic forums and dbxforums. Gamespot and Gametrailers forums were selected so that the survey could get enough exposition, however it turned out that a lot of forums seems to have rules against posting surveys so that decreased the exposition of the survey. A few of the game media websites were also emailed about the survey in hopes of that they could post them in their news sections but none of the websites replied on the email and any links or references to the survey were never posted in any news sections.

The questions asked in the survey were as followed:

1. Have you bought any indie games?
2. How many indie games have you played?
3. Since you answered no on the previous question: What is the main reason you haven't bought any indie games?
4. Since you answered yes on the previous question: What is the one thing you like the most about indie games?
5. Name on thing that you think indie game developers should focus more on when producing their titles:
6. Do you think regular game developers could learn anything from indie game developers?

Question 1 is a closed question, where you can only choose between two answers, yes or no. It is asked to determine what question should come later in the survey as question number 3. Question 2 is asked to determine how many different indie games people that play indie games actually play. It is a mix of a open and closed question where you have a few predetermined answers such as 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15 or Other. The other option is there because listing more ranges of numbers would just be intimidating for the participants. Instead they can just click other and enter a value they prefer. Question 3 and 4 are both of the same type as question number 2. A few predetermined answers are given as options while an other option is there for the people who do not agree with any of those answers. This is to help validate the survey, had the survey only had closed questions where the researcher had determined all the answers before hand people would have been forced to choose those predetermined answers. Which would have made the research biased since there is no possible way for the researcher to know what everyone thinks about the subject. The last two questions are completely open since they are arguably highly individual questions. Every single person probably has a different opinion on the matter. Though one could argue that the survey is quite short it does cover the research objective to find out what people like and what they want to see improved when it comes to indie games in the future and if the survey would have been to long it could have scared off potential participants.

3.2 Interview

When it comes to the interviews it was chosen to be done via email. This was because most of the developers were not located in same country as the researcher. The developers that were emailed and asked for a interview were high profile indie game developers such as Markus Persson the creator of Minecraft, Team Meat the creators of Super Meat Boy and Frozenbyte the creators of Trine. A total of five developers were emailed and asked about a interview. A few other developers were also subjects of interests but not all of them had any public contact information available. Such as Gaijin Games the creators of BIT. TRIP RUNNER and BIT. TRIP BEAT. The questions for the interviews were prepared before the emails were sent out and all developers got the same six questions. The questions are showed in appendix B.

All the questions were open questions to encourage the developers to think about their answers. While the amount of questions asked might be small they all fit the subject on indie games and popularity, the first three questions are obviously direct embodiment of the research objectives of this survey. Where the latter three is to get a more in depth view on what indie games are doing right and what they might be doing wrong. Whereas the sample size is quite small, it was done on purpose and chosen among the best that the industry has to offer. The problem with developers though is that they are busy people and as such might not all respond.

The data collected from the interviews and the surveys will then be analyzed and compared to the result of the literature review. Then a conclusion will be presented where the reasons for indie games success should be quite clear.

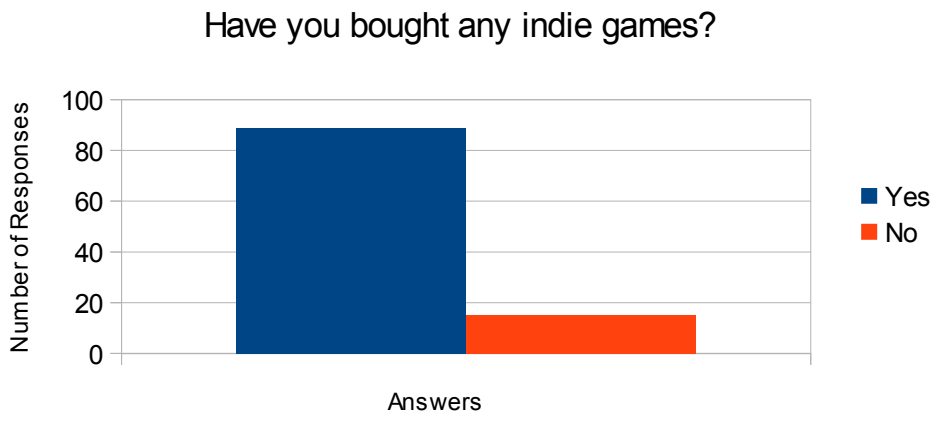
4 Empirical Research Findings

In this section the findings from the research will be presented and discussed. First individually from the survey and the interview and then compared with the literature review and one another.

4.1 Survey

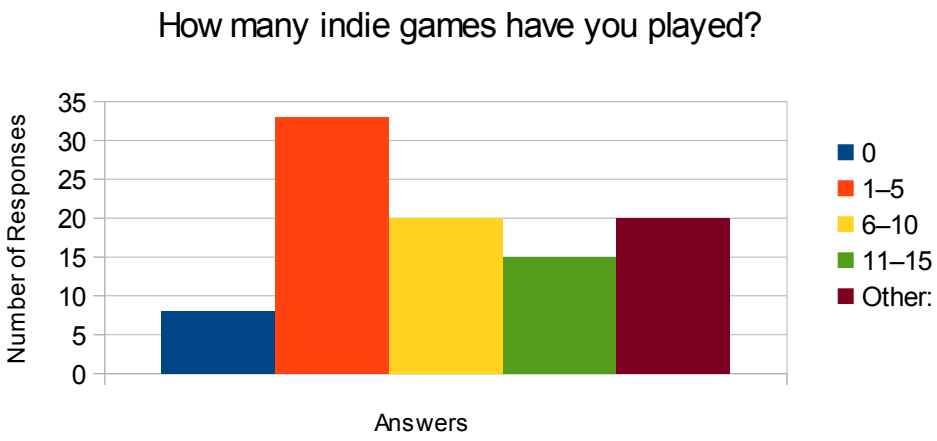
The full survey results can be seen in Appendix A. During this sub-section the data gained will be first summarized and then discussed on their own merit. And will then later be compared to the results of the interviews and the result of the literature review. There was a total number 104 participants which should be a sufficient amount of data to form some conclusions.

Question 1:
Have you bought any indie games?



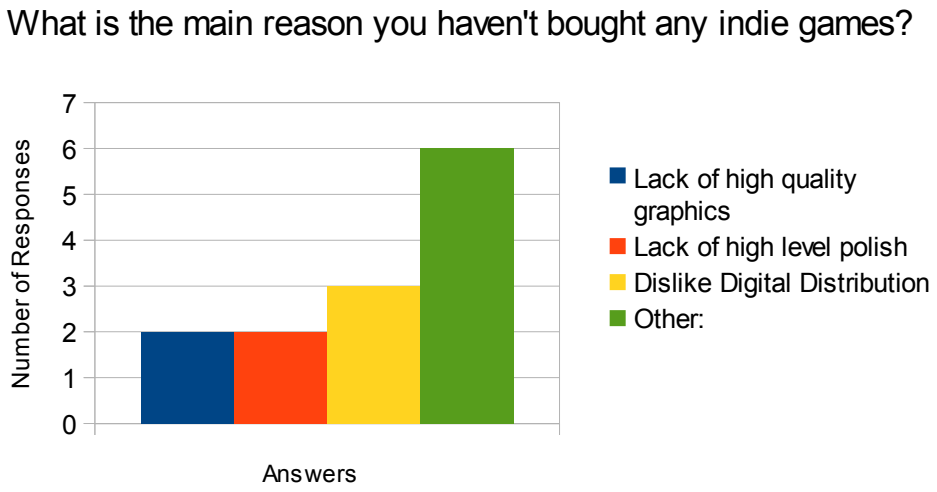
Answers: 89 people answered yes on this question while 15 people answered no. If about 85% of the participants have played indie games it is safe to say that indie games indeed do seem to be popular.

Question 2:
How many indie games have you played?



Answers: People who chose the other option had very varied answers. Some people only answered more or over 15 as their response others went along and said they had played over or around 50 indie games. Where other answers ranged from 20-30 or 30+ or 20+. This result seem to strengthen the idea of indie games becoming very popular, as people seem to not only buy indie games, they seem to play a lot of different ones. Arguably it does nothing to help understand how large the audience is, it does however shed some light on how many different indie games individual people play.

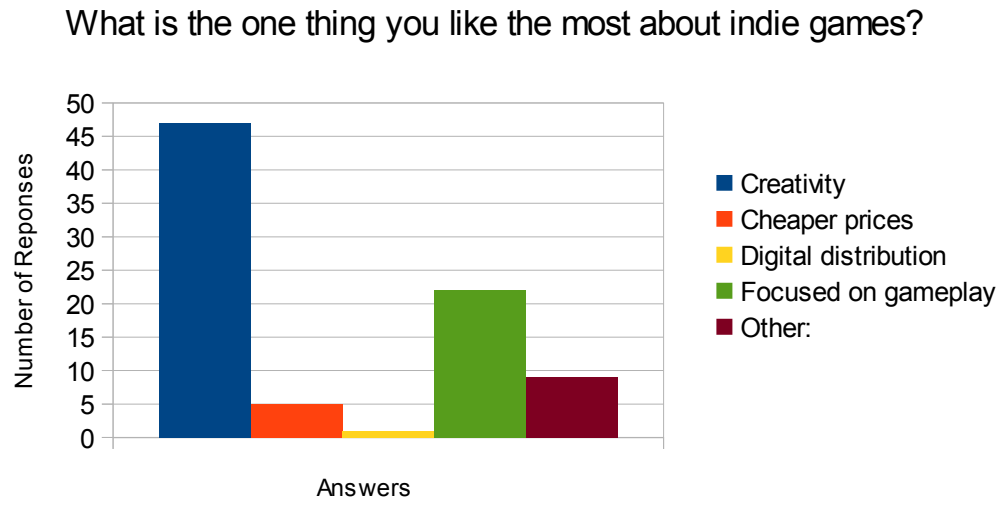
Question 3:
Since you answered no on the previous question: What is the main reason you have not bought any indie games?



Answers: The other answers were things such as *not interested in them*, *don't play games*, others proclaimed they had heard many great things about indie games but never gotten around to trying any and others expressed the lack of time or money for playing indie games. The results for this question were quite expected, people have

limited free time and hence the time they spend on their hobbies are valuable, whereas some people like what indie games represents in this growing industry where sequels and mass appeal has become the norm others might not because they feel that they get more value out of the regular games where at least some sort of quality is required to actually be published. That is not to say that indie games are in any terms bad or that all regular games are always good. But that some people feel more assured of a products quality and the enjoyment they will get out of it when buying regular games.

Question 4:
Since you answered yes on the previous question: What is the one thing you like the most about indie games?



Answers: 9 people chose to answer other with answers such as: all of the above mentioned, that steam sales and indie bundles fuel his love for indie games since during those sales the games can be bought incredibly cheap. A few answered that they like that indie games break the mold that the big game publishers now focus on and that you can feel the developers passion for their games and not just the idea of making more money. Someone answered visual style/atmosphere as a major contributor to why he likes indie games and one person answered that he likes nothing in particular. The majority of answers seem to praise indie games for their creative ideas and that they try to break the molds set up by the other parts of the industry and it is probably safe to assume that this is one of the largest reasons for indie games success. 22 people praised the focus on gameplay over the focus of graphics, which seems to go along with the thoughts presented in the game design books where graphics cannot substitute good gameplay while good gameplay can substitute good graphics.

Question 5:
Name one thing you think indie game developers should focus more on when producing their titles?

Answers: This was an open question, with 66 responses, while a effort could be made and list all 66 reposes that would soon become boring. Hence a summary of the majority of the a will be presented, if you are interested in all the 66 answers check appendix A. A lot of the answers mention that they want to see originality and creative

ideas in their indie games as well as that they like when a game is focused on gameplay over graphics.. Other says that the developers should make games they like and not games the market says. A lot also say that they want to see longer indie games as the majority of indie games are on the short side, they want more replayability. Some other people want to see better advertising for indie games and an increase in availability. And spending time on extra polishing and bug fixing is also encouraged. Others argue that instead of just focusing on doing something different they also got to focus on doing something good, whereas others would like to see more unique art styles and some others want better support for open source operating systems. These answers also further validate the answers on question number 4. Everyone wants indie game developers to continue being creative and encourage them to not be swayed by the norms of big game publishers, while they also got to focus on reaching larger audiences and always keep the gameplay at the games core.

Question 6:

Do you think regular game developers could learn anything from indie game developers?

Answers: This was also an open question and the method used to present the answers will be the same as the previous questions, a summary of what the majority have written. Where everyone seems to agree on that they want to see more original and creative ideas come out of the larger developers as well as they argue that they should learn that all games do not need the budget of a AAA game to be successful. Others argue that the two sides are too different to be compared and that the regular developers will always have to keep profitability even if they use creative ideas and thinking. People would also like to see a higher focus on gameplay in regular games instead of trying to impress with graphics, and some argue that the regular games should stop trying to copy blockbuster movies for their way of doing storytelling. Something people also seem to think that indie game developers to better is listening to their community and being in contact with them. And that indie games have proved that other genres other than the big money makers such as third person shooters and first person shooters and sports games can be successful. This also supports what question number 4 and 5 suggested. People like indie games because of their creativity and because they are not just another shooter or just another action game. They try different ideas and concepts as well as being better with communication with their consumers.

The summary of the answers the survey has yielded points out that the majority likes indie games because of their creative ways, breaking the industry standards and that they tend to focus highly on the gameplay instead of the high tech graphics presentations.

4.2 Interviews

Where the survey could be argued to be quite the success with over 100 participants and lots of different opinions, when it comes to the interviews only one company has responded so far to the actual questions. While another has responded that they wanted to participate in the interview and have been given the interview questions the researcher has yet to receive the answers to these questions. The interview answers can be seen in appendix C. This is not enough data to form any conclusions from it and hence the results will not be thoroughly analyzed.

5 Discussion

It could be argued that the survey did not have enough participants to form a valuable conclusion considering that the gaming community is a very large community. However time was limited and the distribution method chosen might not have been the best choice, considering that the larger forums such as gametrailers.com, gamespot.com and gamereactor.se forbid that surveys are posted on the forums. Which is also why gametrailers.com and gamereactor.se was emailed and asked if they could post about the survey on their websites, however they did not respond to the emails. All measures were taken to try and get the survey to reach as many people as possible and as such it reached about 110 participants which the researcher deemed sufficient to come to a conclusion, considering the limits of the research. It could be argued that these results are biased since the survey was posted to the minecraftforums which is a forum concerning the indie game minecraft. However the researcher did not see a particular increase in participants after posting it on the minecraftforums, it was when the survey was posted on the FZ.se forums the participants numbers increased drastically. And all the other forums it was posted on is forums for general gaming discussion where people that likes all kinds of games go to discuss the games they like. A question about where people heard of the survey could have helped with showing where the answers came from.

For the interview more data could probably have been gathered if calls were made to the developers instead of sending emails. However not all companies had a phone number in their contact information. The choice to do it over email was for convenience of the researcher since social interaction, specially not with strangers is not one of his strong points.

Of course further research on the subject is encouraged since more knowledge around the subject is valuable for upcoming game developers and old developers as well. This approach could be used but with improvements such as calling the developers for interviews and calling the larger gaming media websites about the survey in the hopes of getting them to post it on their news feeds. The questions in the surveys and the interview could probably be further developed to get more data and information from the participants.

6 Conclusion and Self-reflection

6.1 Conclusion

A definition for good game design could not be identified, since the subject is very subjective, while there are some things that are commonly agreed on as good practices most of the other parts depends on the eye of the beholder. A few key subjects the books that were handled in the literature review discussed was that as a game designer you should always be thinking about how the players will interact with your game. Another hot topic was that gameplay can substitute for good graphics but good graphics cannot substitute for broken or bad gameplay. And that even if you are creating games of an already existing genre with already existing gameplay standards you should always add your own twist to the formula to make the game your own. Indie game developers also argued that a very important part of developing their games is that they develop games that they themselves want to play, enjoy playing and can be proud of.

When it comes to the second research objective the literature review turned up more successful. Digital distribution is arguably the key technological advancement to indie games rise in fame. This is because it eliminates most of the costs from selling at retail stores such as shipping costs, shelf prices and disc manufacturing that have previously hindered indie games to reach out to the larger audiences. Thanks to the help of digital distribution platforms such as Valve's Steam, Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade, Sony's Playstation Network and Apple's App Store developers can now reach larger audiences with their games. Even if those platforms are not appealing, you can always host your own website and server and distribute your game from there, which is what Markus Persson did with his Minecraft. This was then further reinforced by the fact that most if not all indie games are distributed this way today.

To find out what the customers and developers thought about indie games empirical research was conducted, in the form of surveys and interviews. While arguably the number of participants in the survey where quite low it still provided a view of what people think of indie games. A majority of people that took the survey had played indie games and the answers indicated that they liked indie games because they are creative and daring and usually focus on gameplay instead of high tech graphics. While they further went on and stated that they want the regular game developers to realize that there is a market for lower budget games which allow more innovation and creative thinking than the high budget game blockbusters. While the effort to interview developers only turned up one response. The answers that were provided from the developer line up well with the conclusions that can be drawn from the survey and the literature review.

So to answer the question that was the center of this research: Why have indie games gained their popularity? Judging by the empirical data that was recovered it is because people want some different, unique and fun in a market where the regular industry is working with set molds to take less risks and maximize profits. And the reason these people can today find these games is because of digital distribution that provides indie game developers with a much cheaper alternative than regular retail distribution for their games.

6.2 Self-reflection

There are probably a lot of ways this research could have been better executed.

To better refining of the survey questions and more elaborate interview questions, as well as how the literature review was conducted, at least on the game design part. When it comes to the indie games part there was not a lot of literature to begin with so what was available and relevant was used. And arguably me as a student should have had more contact with my supervisor, that would probably have helped with a few areas of the study. While there was only one response to the interview that arguably was to be expected. Indie game developers are people too and they are busy with their work different projects and obviously it is their choice if they want to reply to my email and be interviewed. Some of these developers also probably get a lot of email so there is the possibility that my questions were lost in the heaps of mail or caught in a spam filter. Then we have the distribution of the survey. While 104 participants seems quite low compared to how much people frequently visit video game forums and their websites, you also have to take into consideration that a lot of forums have rules against posting surveys and threads which have the purpose of distributing links. Add to that the factor of that the particular part of the forum where you can post your survey might not be the most visited and you might not reach a lot of the people that visit the other parts of the forums. Overall I am pleased with the work, could it have been done better? Yes it could, in probably more ways than one but I did manage to fulfill my research objectives and the overall research aim. And there were plenty of time for me to probably have done it better, however I did not utilize all the time I had to it's full potential.

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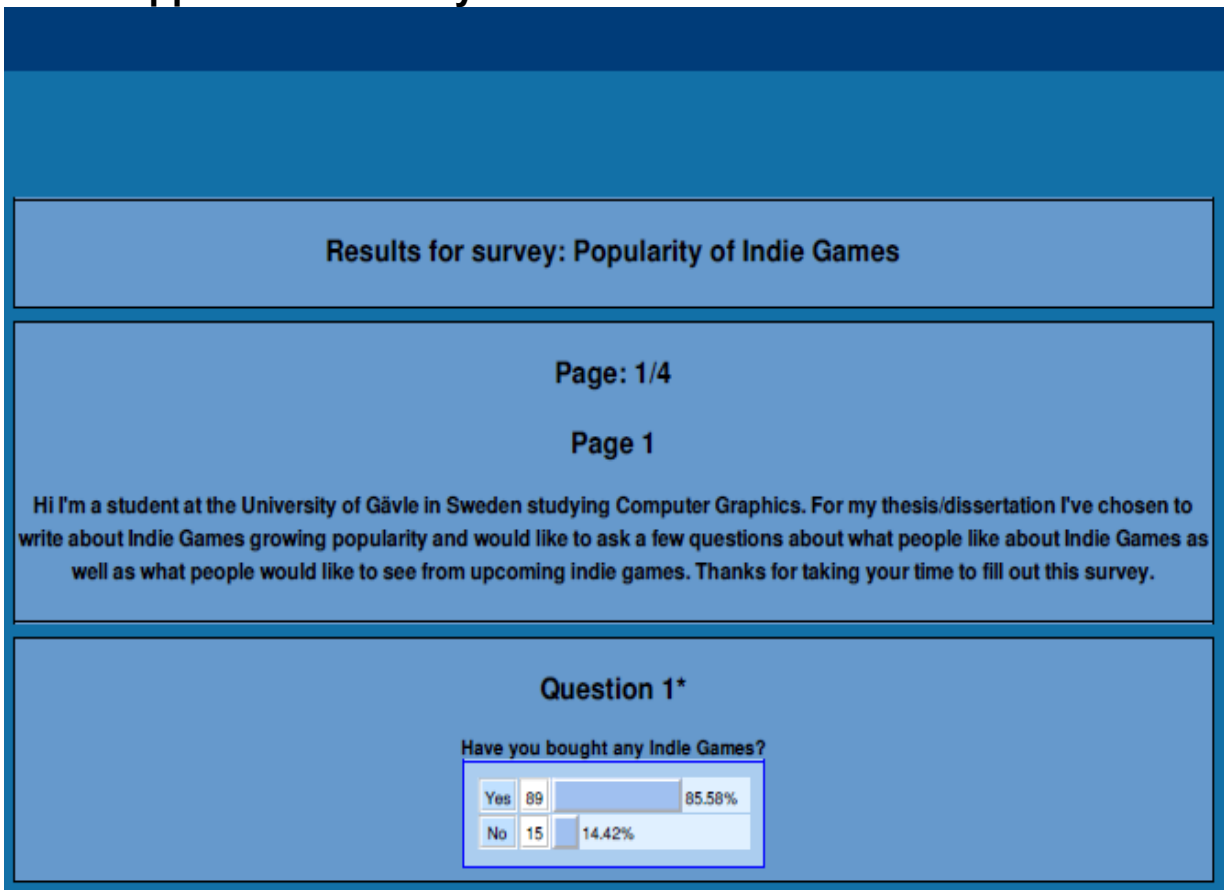
Appendix A: Survey results



Results for survey: Popularity of Indie Games

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Page 1

Hi I'm a student at the University of Gävle in Sweden studying Computer Graphics. For my thesis/dissertation I've chosen to write about Indie Games growing popularity and would like to ask a few questions about what people like about Indie Games as well as what people would like to see from upcoming indie games. Thanks for taking your time to fill out this survey.

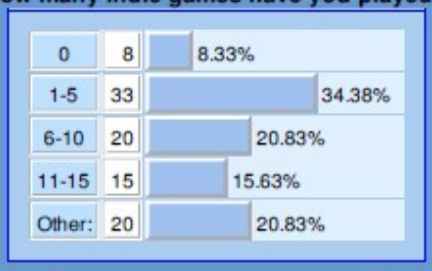
Question 1*

Have you bought any Indie Games?

Yes	89	85.58%
No	15	14.42%

Question 2*

How many indie games have you played?

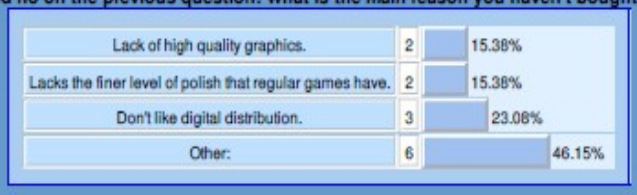


Other:
>50
more
~20-25
324
Over 50
20+
50+
30+
30+
+20
1
ca 20 exkluding online games
15+
20-30
15+
shitloads
15+
50+
20-25
=50

Page: 2/4

Question 3*

Since you answered no on the previous question: What is the main reason you haven't bought any Indie Games?

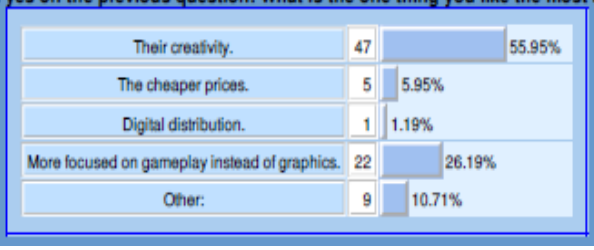

Lack of high quality graphics. 2 15.38%
Lacks the finer level of polish that regular games have. 2 15.38%
Don't like digital distribution. 3 23.08%
Other: 6 46.15%

Other:
No interest in them.
Don't play games
I've heard many great things about them. I just never got around to buying any.
There are so many non indie games that I'd rather play.
No money,
Not enough time and interest

Page: 3/4

Question 4*

Since you answered yes on the previous question: What is the one thing you like the most about Indie Games?


Their creativity. 47 55.95%
The cheaper prices. 5 5.95%
Digital distribution. 1 1.19%
More focused on gameplay instead of graphics. 22 26.19%
Other: 9 10.71%

Other:
Indie game genres don't usually exist outside of Japan.
A combination of all of the above. There is no one standout reason, generally they have better gameplay, but some also have better graphics. Not in the sense of higher quality, but in the sense of a much better art direction. Having said that, some games like Trine look amazing. With regards to digital distrobution and prices, things like steam and the indie bundles are incredible, since ive picked up hundreads of indie games for - on average - 49p per
combination of everything
Mer originella och vågar ta ut svängarna. Anpassar sig inte efter marknaden (a lá Call of Duty).
More "Love" in the creation of the game, it feels like the designers acctualy care about the games, instead of just money.
They break out of the usual box and create games that aren't a "safe investment" like FIFA 19 or CoD 27.
Nothing in particular
atmosphere / visual style
I just brought them because steam sales.

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Question 5*

Name one thing that you think indie game developers should focus more on when producing their titles:

Text Answers (66)
They should focus on developing something that hasn't be brought to the table yet. To try to be original but yet try to keep the fundamentals that makes a game successful.
the style of the game so that they offer something new and refreshing
Qualityy
Indie developers have much more design freedom, so it's disheartening to see so many indie games that take on genres that are already overdone. Experiment with a genre and see how you can do something different that hasn't been seen before.
The story.
Not sure
Some indie game developers need to try and stick out more. They tend to stick to oversaturated genres and not do too much new or different to varant a purchase.
Polishing. Many good, but not great, indie games accomplish a lot just by being based on a good idea and carried out by someone talented. But to be really great, it needs those finishing touches.
Originality
Anime aesthetic.
I have actually never played an Indie game, although, I would like to try out a couple. From what I can gather, they don't need much improvement.
Replay value.
I think indie games are fine the way they are right now.
Gameplay.
Try to be different and original.
Gameplay, gameplay gameplay. I dont find graphics very appealing, but when i get a good hack and slash it gets me hooked.
Gameplay over graphics. Make games that are functional rather than just good-looking. Although, keeping a good atmosphere helps.
Think how to appease to different crowds, rpg indie games would more likely catch the eye of rpg gamers, so how about making an rpg game, but with some sort of twist?
Refinement - Sometimes games tend to feel a bit unfinished and unpolished.
To make games a little more substantial even for a higher cost
More focus to adding some depth. Meaning that we need 3D or even 2 1/2 D games cause the technology is growing.
Original graphics, alot of indie games have similar styles. Also most a side-scrollers, there should be some more 3D indie games.
Advertising, alot of indie games are never heard of until people spread the word.
Göra bra spel som sticker ut från mängden.
More of everything, improve.
För många indiespelutvecklare fokuserar på att vara annorlunda istället för att fokusera på att göra något bra.
I Dunno actually.
Availability.
Gör det inte allt för komplicerat, ha guider
Keeping the game close to its community
Length. Most Indiegames I've played are short, which is okay if it's a small developer with a limited or non-existent budget. Still, though, more content is always good.
Doing something original (or simply redo something original even better).
Originality - to be different than other games. Not necessarly totally different, but still not be mainstream. Dare to do something else than others.
.
always, and always keep the gameplay closer to the heart instead of graphics.

longer games
Creative gameplay
Talking to their customers
Gameplay and storylines. Todays modern, big developer games are so intent on beating eachother in graphics and performance they destroy the story and make it linear. guessable.
Humor.
I think they're pretty good as they are
Something that doesn't become a drudgery.
Not sure.
Make the games longer
Bugs and polishing. I know many indie developers make polished games but the majority doesn't. A good game with bugs just ruins the experience for many including me.
Keep doing Fun and random games, rather than competing with big titels! Thats waht makes them awesome!
This is not something which I have encountered often, but some games try to do more with their games than what is realistically possible. Indie game developers do not have the same technological means as the big companies. The beauty of good indie games is that they manage to do more with
less.
I'd like to see more Indie developers implement multiplayer into their titles. It's nice to see the developers of the Torchlight series have listened to the community and are going to offer Multiplayer in T2!
Våga ännu mera!
Creating better gameplay
Being unique, both in artstyle and with gameplay.
lenght
Do the games you want to do, not the ones the market says.
Nothing just keep it far away from all AAA-titels and they does it good.
Bugs.
To really stand out and not just make another "cute puzzle-platformer with retro-graphics".
Somehow get people to know their games exists.
go with their own style, don't get too influenced by mainstream culture. and to never sign anything from EA games.
Better story elements and not just new creative games. A smart story is always a plus!
Making the gameplayidea fun. Most important thing in any game.
Instead of trying to force creativity in this time and age, when structure is seen as something that hinders rather then helps. they should keep their own ideas and ignore the voices of public, and learn from what the industry did right. In short: Keep in mind the bigger picture and see what problems an "anything goes" attitude will bring.
better support for open source operating system.
I think that indie games are fine as they are now. They are really cheap, digital distribution, gameplay over graphics. Awesome, that's all i can say. Well, if one thing, indie games tend to be kinda short.
I think that they should keep focusing on the creativity and gameplay aspects such as creating original and interesting concepts.
Focusing on interesting and creative ideas in games rather than going with the mainstream stuff.
Art style, simple is better the "cheap" advanced gfx, same goes for sound, if you can't afford good voice actors, don't use voices!

Question 6*

Do you think regular game developers could learn anything from indie game developers?

Text Answers (66)
Yes, I think they can. Some developers do a good job but what they can learn in general is to try to create something different, when let's say creating a new IP. Nowadays a lot of games feel identical to each other while a lot of indie games try something different. Wile some miserably fail, a lot of are indeed successful, like Journey.
yes to be a little more creative
Pricing
Reduce development costs, make games that are more concise and tightly focused, with less content and ideas that are extraneous and not really adding anything to the experience other than busywork. Learn how to teach the player by showing through gameplay, rather than telling in a tutorial section.
Yes they could, they could learn about making fun, new, inventive games instead of the same old stuff being released for the past 10+ years.
Dare more.
More tightly focused experiences, that all games doesn't need a super high budget to be successfull.
Yes, many things. Primarily, it is not easy to predict what the market wants. The big developers, and even moreso - the big publishers, should spend more time developing good ideas and less time appraising the market.
Yes, making more original games.
Mainstream consumers don't matter. Just developing games for games will immortalize their art much better.
I do. All regular game developers can learn a thing or two from the smaller guy.
Yes. That would be creative and original ideas.
Yes, they need to learn to take more risks, and stop borrowing elements from cinema.
Yes.
The financial risk would be too high if they would keep on releasing games of which the style has not been proven to work yet. I think they can adapt upon the model of a succesful indie game, but they by no means can take the same amount of risks.
Not to focus on graphics so much, and to work at the game its self. The story, the mechanics and creativity.
Yes. Not all games need to be high-budget, high-cost to be good.
That even with a small budget, crew and time, you can still make an enjoyable game.
Yes. Games require care and attention, they cant just be churned out to meet profit margins. Games that have a much longer development time (while not always) tend to feel a lot less rushed, learn from past mistakes, advance the genre and feel much tighter overall.
Do make games more gamey and less cinematic
No because they are coming at the aspect of games from two completely different angles.
Yes, the game isnt just about graphics its about having fun online and alone.
Absolutely. They could learn to try something new instead of going for the same formula over and over.
Ja, bra spel säljer. Visserligen är det utgivarna som borde lära av indieutvecklarna och ge större studios mer fria tyglar.
Creativity gameplay, pricing digital distribution
Nej. De är inom två olika genrer. Det vore naivt att tro att "regular game developers" skulle sluta anpassa sig efter marknadsekonomin.
Love their games.

Yes. Don't use the same mold to make all games. Develop lower budget titles with different game-play than current AAA titles. Dare to be different. That or all coming titles will either be sports-related or chest-high-walls-simulators.
Fokusera inte alltför mucket på det grafiska aspkekterna i spelet.
Absolutely. There is a lot of things regulars devs should learn from the indie industry. Things like listening to players opinions and reacting to their suggestions and so on.
Plenty! Be more creative, take more chances. Use the big budgets to explore new game-territory instead of expanding old games, like CoD.
Perhaps not the regular developers but mainly the publishers. Original ideas can be more successful than doing game 464567 in a series that adds nothing new that the older games didn't have.
Yes, as above, dare to do something else than mainstream. Break the standard and do something new.
.
care more about gameplay instead of graphics
smaller, better, and most importantly more creative games
Absolutley
Talking to their customers
Storylines and gameplay. more creativity
They can learn that repetetive aspects of a game to make it longer doesn't neccessarily make it better.
yes, bigger isn't always better!
Of course.
They should focus on producing original game-play and story lines instead of reproducing popular trends.
Yeah indie games are often well more interesting
Yes, to think outside the box. Many developers make the same games over and over again. Some indie developers have shown that you don't have to make conventional games to succeed.

Stop going for the money, do games for the players!
Graphics will always get outdated, but innovativeness and a beautiful art style will be enjoyable for years to come.
Absolutely. Customer service and striving to be different for a start.
Ja! Det känns ofta som att dem är rädda för att prova något nytt. Så istället får vi en produkt som känns igen från allt annat som redan finns ute.
They should look at what indie games can accomplish in a wide spectre of genres instead of just focusing on what is most popular right now (FPS/TPS).
Thinking outside the box, not just make a new game that offers nearly the same gameplay, as the most succesful game in the industry.
Alot in how they r played and that graphics arn´t everyting.
Yes, the freedom they have to be creative should inspire the AAA-type game developers.
Yea the creavity now all big developers just take that indiegamesr allready have done and does it again just with better grapich. They don't come up with new ideas.
Yes. Make games with love.

Being creative. Listen to the community. Explore different ways of telling stories within the gaming medium.
Yes. They could learn that linear, repetitive, cinematic, on-rail, LOLHIGHGRAPHICS, heavy drm infested games are dull and overdone.
YES! "mainstream developers" often lose the "edge" since they tooooo often think about money.
Yes, the fact that graphics compared to gameplay and story is nothing. A fun and captivating game tends to be much better than games based solely on graphics
Yes, learn how to experiment and discover new ways of doing things.
No, not on that scale, what is indie if the bigger boys use the same system. The only thing i like to see change from the developers on the "regular" side, is a breakaway from established selling genres, it would not hurt to see more games like MineCraft or "Grimrock" from established houses, who can keep track and make sure the games industry as a whole (on all levels) is kept on track of appropriate context, not allowing the trendy "Anything goes" mentality.
No they cant, its two different sides of the gaming industry with to different goals with their products.
Regular game developers try to make awesome graphics for their games, but miss the most important thing: gameplay. I dont care at all about the graphics, it's all about the gameplay. I still find games like Megaman and Mario to be alot funnier than new games like Mass Effect, Call of Duty and Battlefield and so on.
Yes, I think that they could learn that sometimes less is more, and just because a game has the latest, best graphics for example, it doesn't necessarily make it a good game.
They could learn that it can be profitable to try out new ideas and thinking outside the box instead of always using the tried and true techniques.
Taking risks on new grounds.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What do you think people see in indie games that they can't find in regular published games?

2. What do you think is good game design?

3. What technical advancement during the past ten years do you think has helped the development and distribution of indie games the most?

4. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for people that might want to develop indie games?

5. Do you think indie games are helping the gaming industry to develop and evolve? If so in what way?

6. What do you think the large game developers could learn from indie game developers and/or what do you think indie game developers could learn from the larger game developers?

Appendix C: Email interview with Joel from Frozenbyte

1. What do you think people see in indie games that they can't find in regular published games?

Indie games can experiment more due to their very nature (small, quick projects and/or small teams with not many expenses). This helps create different kind of experiences compared to big publisher AAA games that have to please the masses and aren't really allowed to fail.

2. What do you think is good game design?

Good game design is in the eye of the beholder - there are some universal "good" thing a game can do, including some user interface/experience things, but when it comes to actual game design it's not a black/white thing. Perhaps I'd say good game design is such that fits the target audience.

3. What technical advancement during the past ten years do you think has helped the development and distribution of indie games the most?

Online distribution, no question. Not only Steam but the general expansion of broadband has really made the internet an easy avenue for everybody (even if it doesn't help with marketing etc).

4. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for people that might want to develop indie games?

Start small, get things done, and learn by cumulative experience.

5. Do you think indie games are helping the gaming industry to develop and evolve? If so in what way?

It's easier to try new things in indie games, so in that sense yes.

Quirky design ideas or even experimental technology are easier to use in an indie game due to the smaller budgets (less risk of failure, or in fact no matter if the game fails or not).

6. What do you think the large game developers could learn from indie game developers and/or what do you think indie game developers could learn from the larger game developers?

It's hard to say, because I don't think the actual developers are that much different. Most of the differences come from the publishers and the general nature of the industry - the bigger the project the more "extra" there is between the developers and the audience.

So I hope that helps at least a bit, sorry for not being very thorough or thinking this through too much, we're just too busy at the moment. Good luck nevertheless!